

# Analysis of the “Dual-Supervisor System” Pathway for Full-Time Professional Master’s Students in Education

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**Abstract:** *In light of the current challenges faced by the “dual-supervisor system” in the cultivation of professional degree master’s students—such as institutional formalization, superficial collaboration, and insufficient practical impact—this study takes provincial public universities offering education-related professional master’s programs as an example. It explores strategies to integrate on-campus and off-campus educational resources, maximize the advantages of the dual-supervisor system, and proposes solutions from conceptual, institutional, and practical perspectives. These recommendations aim to enhance the quality of cultivation.*

**Keywords:** *dual-supervisor system, education, professional master’s degree*

## 1. Introduction

Professional degree graduate education serves as a primary channel and critical means for cultivating high-level applied talents in China. Initially implemented in the early 21st century, this system has expanded nationwide over nearly two decades. To meet the demands of economic development and societal transformation, enrollment in professional degree programs has grown annually. By 2025, it is projected that professional degree students will account for two-thirds of total master’s-level enrollments. Taking education-related professional master’s programs as an example, their unique “academic + vocational” dual nature necessitates a “dual-track” cultivation model. This model emphasizes the simultaneous enhancement of academic theoretical learning and professional practical capabilities, with a core focus on developing teaching practice competence. Cultivating such competence requires not only theoretical mastery of disciplinary knowledge but also the ability to apply academic theories to resolve practical teaching challenges, thereby demanding dual guidance in both theory and practice.

On September 25, 2020, the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council and the Ministry of Education issued the "Development Plan for Professional Degree Postgraduate Education (2020-2025)" (hereinafter referred to as the "Plan"). The Plan clearly states that efforts should be made to "significantly enhance the quality of professional degree postgraduate education".

However, as enrollment scales continue to expand, university supervisors—constrained by limited numbers, uneven quality, and an institutional emphasis on theoretical research over practical guidance—struggle to fully meet the demands for improving the quality of education-related professional degree programs. As education-related professional master’s graduates form the backbone of primary, secondary, and vocational education, their comprehensive competencies directly influence the future quality of China’s foundational education workforce. Under the national strategy of “building a strong educational nation,” the cultivation quality of these graduates is particularly crucial.

## 2. Problems and Challenges in the “Dual Mentor System” for the Cultivation of Professional Degree Postgraduates in Education at Present

To understand the current situation and existing problems in the cultivation of professional degree postgraduates in education, our research conducted a survey through questionnaires and interviews with 4 provincial public universities in a western province that offer professional degree postgraduates in education, as well as with the mentors of these postgraduates, employers, and experts in related fields. The aim was to discover the existing problems as comprehensively as possible and put forward

corresponding suggestions. According to the survey results, the main problems are as follows:

### **2.1 Formalization of the System**

According to the survey results, universities can fully recognize the importance of the "dual-mentor system" and emphasize it to secondary colleges through various meetings, symposiums, and notice documents. However, as the Ministry of Education and other higher-level departments have not issued specific implementation standards and detailed implementation rules for the "dual-mentor system", universities not only find it difficult to scientifically position professional degree postgraduate education, but also cannot accurately and scientifically grasp the laws of professional degree talent cultivation, let alone carry out top-level design. Therefore, in the implementation process of professional degree postgraduate talent cultivation, it is inevitable that there will be formalism problems. Specifically, it is manifested as incomplete relevant systems and inadequate implementation, especially the lack of assessment and management systems for off-campus mentors. Incomplete systems will inevitably lead to inadequate implementation. Due to the lack of management "grips", off-campus mentors not only lack the awareness of their own responsibilities, but also lack a clear plan on how to cultivate and educate professional degree postgraduate students, resulting in the quality of student cultivation depending entirely on the mentor's sense of responsibility. The rich practical teaching experience of off-campus mentors has not been fully utilized. In addition, in the selection process of off-campus mentors, educational management personnel and front-line teachers are the majority. Due to the large amount of work they have to undertake, to a certain extent, they have accumulated the guidance work for students. This leads to some off-campus mentors not being dedicated enough when guiding, and even having the phenomenon of being only nominally involved, and not fulfilling the guidance responsibilities and tasks of mentors, resulting in the formalism of the "dual-mentor system" cultivation model.

Some postgraduate students have reflected that they have few meetings with off-campus mentors, and the guidance on course learning, topic selection and opening, thesis writing, and teaching skills training is far less than that provided by on-campus mentors, leading to the guidance by off-campus mentors being superficial and formalized.

### **2.2 Shallow Cooperation**

Since professional degree postgraduate education generally adopts the "dual-mentor system" where on-campus mentors are responsible for the overall guidance of professional degree postgraduate students and off-campus mentors are responsible for the guidance of postgraduate students' educational practice, including guiding educational internships, internships, and research, as well as the entire process of thesis writing. Both should cooperate comprehensively and deeply to jointly cultivate postgraduate students. However, currently, a clear-cut "1+1=2" talent cultivation model exists, with on-campus and off-campus mentors "minding their own business", lacking communication and exchange, and even lacking the formulation and implementation of a full series and full-process talent cultivation plan. Even if there is communication, it is mostly temporary and short-term, leading to the "shallow" cooperation between on-campus and off-campus mentors. As a result, on-campus mentors lack the transition from theory to practice, and off-campus mentors lack the transition from practice to theory. What should have been a "two-way" communication and collaboration has become a "solo performance" of each party. Ultimately, the rich educational theory and solid teaching practice ability that educational master's students should possess have not been fully integrated, and the quality of talent cultivation has not reached the ideal state.

### **2.3 Deficiency in Functionality**

The cultivation of educational research and teaching abilities for Master of Education students involves a dual focus on "teaching theory + educational and teaching practice". "By integrating both on-campus and off-campus educational resources and fully leveraging the knowledge and ability advantages of both on-campus and off-campus mentors to jointly guide and cultivate, a solid foundation can be laid for the training of expert and practical teachers, which is an important measure to enhance the quality of professional degree education."<sup>[1]</sup> It also serves as a win-win platform for universities, internship bases, and students, and is conducive to broadening the employment channels of professional degree postgraduates and enhancing their sense of social responsibility. However, according to follow-up investigations of primary and secondary schools and other employers, nearly 30%

of Master of Education students encounter the situation of “being able to teach but not write, or being able to write but not teach” in their actual work, far from achieving the goal of training expert and practical teachers. The root causes are as follows: First, there is a deficiency in the educational department’s framework, with no detailed and implementable regulations for the training of professional degree postgraduates, such as Master of Education students. This easily leads to incomplete training systems and non-compliance in universities. Second, universities place different levels of emphasis on academic and professional master’s degrees. Due to a lack of understanding of professional degree postgraduate education, the allocation of on-campus training resources is uneven. Third, there is a lack of substantive cooperation and communication between on-campus and off-campus mentors, making it impossible to jointly cultivate students. As a result, on-campus and off-campus educational resources cannot be comprehensively integrated, and their respective advantages cannot be fully utilized. This easily leads to students’ lack of understanding or non-compliance with the “dual-mentor system”, and the training and educational functions of the “dual-mentor system” cannot be fully exerted. Ultimately, the talents cultivated cannot meet the needs of employers.

### **3. Analysis of the “Dual Mentor System” Training Path for Professional Degree Postgraduates in Education**

As the “dual mentor system” training model for professional degree postgraduates is a “new thing” compared to the traditional training model for academic master’s degree students, although the education department, universities, and internship bases have been constantly exploring it, a relatively mature and complete model that can be referred to has not yet been formed. Moreover, due to its unique practicality and industry-specific nature, the “dual mentor system” has involved multiple institutions and personnel since its inception, and in the implementation process, it requires the coordination of multiple interests. “Therefore, the implementation of its training path needs to be constructed from aspects such as understanding, system, and execution.”<sup>[2]</sup>Based on the survey results, a certain provincial public normal university S with certain successful experience is selected as an example for path analysis.

#### **3.1 Strengthening Understanding and Training**

One of the problems with the implementation of the “dual-mentor system” training model in colleges and universities is the lack of adequate understanding, especially the lack of study and research on the intrinsic connection between professional degree education and the “dual-mentor system” training model, as well as the essential characteristics of the “mentor system” training model. This leads to errors in understanding and, consequently, deviations in implementation, failing to fully leverage the educational role of the “dual-mentor system”. Therefore, in addition to strengthening the learning and training of colleges and universities on professional degree education and the “dual-mentor system” training model, it is also necessary to increase publicity and training for society and internship bases, so that they can recognize the characteristics of professional degree education and the importance of cooperative training.

To address this issue, S University has established a comprehensive learning and training system through the implementation of the “one body, two wings” initiative, involving the university, management departments, training units, degree programs, on-campus mentors, internship bases, off-campus mentors, and professional degree research. The “one body” refers to training and learning as the core. Each semester, the university holds symposiums on the “dual-mentor system” to analyze existing problems and invite outstanding representatives of on-campus and off-campus mentors to share their experiences. Mentors are sent to participate in national and provincial-level training sessions irregularly, and experts from home and abroad are invited to give lectures on campus to broaden the horizons of teachers and students, keep them updated with the latest theories, and enhance their ideological qualities. The “two wings” refer to on-campus competitions and salons. Taking the discipline teaching (Chinese) major as an example, this major participates in the “Spring Flower Cup” teacher skills competition held by the college every year, promoting learning and teaching through competition. Degree programs regularly hold on-campus mentor training experience salons to discuss the talent cultivation under the “dual-mentor system”. The discussions were centered on professional degree education policies, theories of professional degree education, attributes of professional degree talents, ability indicators for professional degree postgraduates, theoretical knowledge of discipline, professional practice, and the implementation of the “dual-mentor system” for talent cultivation.

Research reports and academic papers were produced, generating a series of research achievements in talent cultivation. For instance, Teacher Y from this degree program has published eight related academic papers in the past five years, including four in high-level core journals, providing strong support for the development of this professional discipline.

### ***3.2 Refinement of Systems and Responsibilities***

Due to the lack of practical and feasible detailed regulations and measures for the “dual-mentor system” in universities, deviations often occur in its implementation. “The core system of implementing the “dual-mentor system” training model is the set of regulations related to mentors, such as mentor selection and assessment, responsibilities and tasks, reward and punishment mechanisms, etc.”<sup>[3]</sup> Particularly in terms of mentor responsibilities and tasks, there are no hard and fast rules. This is also one of the reasons why the “dual-mentor system” training model implemented by colleges and universities has encountered problems. Therefore, to solve this issue, it is necessary to have a comprehensive understanding of the problem and put forward scientific and targeted detailed rules.

Since 2023, S University has collaborated with over ten top middle schools in Chengdu to establish university-level joint training bases. From these, it selects outstanding middle school teachers as graduate student mentors, breaking the previous separation between theoretical teaching in universities and practical teaching in education. In 2024, S University specifically issued the “Trial Management Measures for Graduate Student Mentors of S University”, which provides detailed explanations and regulations on the job responsibilities and rights of graduate student mentors, selection, assessment and rewards and punishments, training, and the management of off-campus part-time graduate student mentors, making mentor management increasingly complete and standardized.

When arranging off-campus mentors and internship bases every year, on the basis of doing a good job in internship mobilization, a “two-way selection” model between professional degree postgraduates and off-campus mentors is implemented. Once selected, postgraduates cannot change their off-campus mentors under non-special circumstances. And the “Task Book for Off-campus Mentors of S University's Professional Master of Education in Teaching” is formulated, which makes detailed regulations on the practical teaching work that off-campus mentors should undertake. Taking educational observation as an example, the task book elaborates in detail on the completion time, purpose, and main content of educational observation. The specific observation guidance tasks of off-campus mentors include: (1) Teaching guidance: guiding postgraduates to attend classes for no less than 6 periods and listen to public classes for no less than 2 times. (2) Class management: participating in theme class meetings or other class management activities for no less than 1 time. (3) Research guidance: ① Guiding postgraduates to participate in no less than 3 on-campus teaching and research activities and 1 municipal or district-level teaching and research activity. ② Participating in no less than 2 special reports or lectures and keeping activity records. Moreover, professional degree postgraduates need to complete the “Full-time Education Master Professional Practice Manual” within the prescribed time and submit it to both on-campus and off-campus mentors and the internship base for review. The training unit and the school management will conduct a comprehensive review of the guidance results of off-campus mentors and the internship situation of students based on this manual. The review results will be used as one of the assessment bases for the guidance of off-campus mentors. From the perspective of system and process, the responsibilities of off-campus mentors have been detailed and clarified.

### ***3.3 Deepening Practice and Cultivation***

The cultivation of professional master's degree students ultimately focuses on specific practice. S University has fully leveraged the guidance functions of both on-campus and off-campus mentors and integrated on-campus and off-campus educational resources, achieving certain results in talent cultivation. The employment rate of full-time education professional postgraduate students has ranked among the top three in the province for several consecutive years among universities with education professional postgraduate programs.

Under the guidance of the educational and teaching ideology of “industry orientation, research feedback, student-centeredness, and value shaping”, S University has explored a three-stage practice model of “concentrated practice and segmented practice”, “on-campus practice and off-campus practice”, and “professional practice and thesis writing” in accordance with the “industry - study -

research - teaching” four-in-one cultivation model.

1) Concentrated Practice and Segmented Practice. In the modern education system, practical teaching has become an important link in cultivating students' comprehensive qualities and abilities. In the postgraduate education stage, particular emphasis is placed on the combination of theory and practice to cultivate students' comprehensive abilities and professional qualities. In the first academic year, in addition to autonomous learning within professional courses, postgraduate students will also conduct concentrated practice and research in micro-teaching courses. Through small-scale and short-term simulated classrooms, students can improve their teaching skills and the ability to reflect on their own teaching behaviors. At the same time, relevant degree programs also offer “Master Teacher Lecture Hall” dual-teacher courses, with content mainly focusing on teaching management and the frontiers of educational reform, taught by middle school master teachers. Students provide course feedback in the form of case reflection and special topic papers, providing a platform for students to understand actual teaching scenarios and the latest trends in educational reform. Through case reflection and special topic papers, students not only deepen their understanding of theoretical knowledge but also promote the development of critical thinking. Joint comments from middle school and university teachers provide students with multi-perspective feedback, helping them examine their learning outcomes and teaching designs from different angles and promoting multi-level thinking. In the second to third academic years, students will each conduct teaching observation and internship. In the real teaching environment, students can observe and experience specific teaching processes, handle classroom management issues, and try to apply various teaching strategies to optimize teaching effects. During this process, students need to write corresponding observation reports and internship reports, record their practical experiences and insights, and conduct in-depth analysis and reflection on their teaching practices, promoting continuous growth in practice and achieving a spiral ascent from theory to practice and back to theory.

2) On-campus and off-campus practice. On campus, students can participate in their mentors' project applications and research, assist in editing and proofreading research results, and combine research with learning to deepen their understanding of the curriculum. By participating in projects, students can experience the process from theoretical discussion to practical operation, further enhancing their comprehensive practical abilities and laying a solid foundation for future teaching and research. At the same time, university mentors will also jointly guide graduate students' off-campus practical teaching, go deep into the front line of teaching, and work with students to explore valuable teaching problems and educational reform cases, guiding students to refine them into cases with educational value to feed back into graduate student teaching. In terms of off-campus practice, graduate students will step onto the front-line classroom, follow off-campus mentors throughout the process, and continuously improve their abilities in lesson presentation, lesson refinement, and class management in real combat. Through this multi-level and multi-dimensional practical teaching, students not only deepen their understanding of theoretical knowledge but also enhance their practical operation and innovation capabilities.

3) Professional Practice and Thesis Writing. Based on the practical experience gained from participating in their mentors' research projects on campus and engaging in in-depth teaching activities at schools outside the university, university mentors assist students in determining their research topics, clarifying their thinking, and guiding them to integrate teaching, educational theories, and curriculum and teaching methods. This process enhances students' teaching practice skills, reflective abilities, and theoretical research capabilities. The practical experience students acquire in these activities provides them with rich materials and new perspectives for their research. In the teaching practice at the front line, students have the opportunity to continuously verify and refine their teaching methods, transform theoretical knowledge into practical actions, and make adjustments and improvements based on feedback. This repetitive practice and reflection process not only improves their reflective abilities but also encourages them to explore new teaching methods with a more open attitude. Professional practice and thesis writing complement each other, forming a complete learning loop. Through this loop, students not only accumulate experience in teaching practice but also deepen their understanding of education through theoretical research.

Since the implementation of the “dual-mentor system”, the three-year theoretical study and teaching practice of postgraduates have been interwoven and integrated. Their teaching experience has been increasingly enriched and their teaching level has rapidly improved. They have become fully familiar with the work of teachers. By the time of graduation, they are already capable of undertaking the related work of teachers and class advisors. In the past five years, the employment rate of full-time postgraduates majoring in education at this university has reached as high as 97%. Taking the discipline

of Chinese education as an example, the employment rate of this major in the past five years has reached 99%. Among them, 83 people have been employed in key primary and secondary schools, accounting for 45.9% of the total number of graduates, and 117 people have been employed in primary and secondary schools in provincial capital cities, accounting for 64.6% of the total number of graduates, which is much higher than the proportion of academic master's degree holders.

#### 4. Conclusions

The “dual-mentor system” is an important approach to enhancing the quality of professional degree postgraduate education. This paper starts with the problems existing in the implementation process, such as the formalization of the system, the superficiality of cooperation, and the absence of the expected role, and combines the successful experiences of specific universities to provide corresponding solutions. These solutions are also applicable to other related majors. However, the relevant countermeasures have only been piloted on a small scale. In the future, theoretical research should be further strengthened to explore an implementation model of the “dual-mentor system” for professional master's degrees that suits China's national conditions, providing strong support for cultivating high-quality applied talents.

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